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# WHAT HAPPENED IN RUSSIA

## TOLD FROM OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

BY CHARLES JOHNSTON

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ONE of the most dramatic facts of the great event in Russia is that the prologue of the revolution was recited, not in the Duma or the barracks, but in the Imperial Palace at Tsarskoe Selo. The actors were the fallen monarch, Nicholas II, and the princes of the House of Romanoff, descendants of the earlier emperors.

Many months before the revolution, these Grand Dukes, keenly resenting the Hessian atmosphere of the court, had practically boycotted the Empress Alexandra. She retorted by haughtily declaring that she cared nothing for the more distinguished classes of society: that she loved only the Russian people, and honored Rasputin as a child of the people. This passive hostility of the princes changed to active intervention last Autumn when, dominated by the Stuermerers and Protopopoffs, who in their turn were ruled by the Empress and Rasputin, Nicholas II finally refused to summon the Duma, to listen to the voice and will of the Russian nation. There was a council of the princes. Two of their number, Alexander Mikhailovitch and Mikhail Alexandrovitch, went from this council to the Emperor. They spoke to him, very directly and earnestly, of the imminent danger to Russia, to his own throne. They spoke of the grave menace of German intrigue surrounding the Empress. But Nicholas II refused to see, and coldly dismissed them. He was equally obdurate in the face of earnest letters of advice from the courts of Denmark and of England; and perhaps his last opportunity passed when he refused to listen to the counsels of the French and English mission headed by ex-Premier Viviani and Lord Milner who,

we are told, urged him either to choose patriotic ministers from the Duma, or at least to select ministers who would be acceptable to the Duma. Both these counsels Nicholas rejected.

But the real drive of the revolution was to come neither from foreign counsel nor from the Russian princes. It came from the hungry multitudes of Petrograd. There should have been no food shortage. In the year before the war, Russia exported grain valued at \$350,000,000. For three years, that immense surplus had been held up by the Turkish batteries along the Bosphorus. There should have been abundance throughout Russia. But the workers of Petrograd starved. On Friday, March 9, the hungry crowds began to gather along Nevsky Prospect, the great avenue—so wide that it dwarfs the high buildings on either hand—that runs east and west across the circle of Petrograd. The crowd cried out for bread. The shops of the bakers were pillaged.

On Saturday, March 10, the workers decided on a general strike, to drive home their hunger plea. Factories were empty; shops along Nevsky put their shutters up. Dense and noisy crowds thronged the streets, with their pathetic cry for bread. It was the chill, bright season of far northern spring, with snow caked hard upon the ground, the lucent sky pale turquoise blue.

Protopopoff, Minister of the Interior, let loose against the crowd a swarm of military police, with bands of Cossacks. The police tried to lash and bully the crowds into subjection, and several of the demonstrators were killed. The Cossacks, contrary to Protopopoff's expectation, either acted with half-hearted reluctance or openly fraternized with the strikers. On that day, the newspapers suspended publication.

On Sunday, March 11, huge placards, posted during the night on the walls of Petrograd by Protopopoff's police, announced that the Duma was prorogued. But the members of the Duma, under the presidency of Michael Rodzianko, refused to obey the proclamation. From the outskirts of the city, from the Islands in the mouth of the Neva, where its swift, cold torrent pours into the Gulf of Finland, the workers flocked to the center of Petrograd, to the great Palace Square, with the column of Alexander I at its center, which lies between the western end of Nevsky and the Neva, with the vast, somber Winter Palace running north and south along the Neva's bank. Further down the river is the

Admiralty, with its arrow-like spire surmounted by a golden ship, high against the sky.

Throughout the forenoon the crowds gathered in the Palace Square and the wide streets running into it. About mid-afternoon, the order was given, again by Protopopoff, that the police and soldiers should disperse the people, firing on them if they resisted. The order was pitilessly carried out; the snow before the Anitchkoff Palace, home of the Empress Dowager, was reddened by the blood of many who fell. Ambulances, hurried to the scene, carried away hundreds who were gravely wounded. This was the first pitched battle of the revolution.

But the crowds, that had been entirely peaceful in the morning, came back with arms, and the battle began again that night and in the early dawn of Monday, March 12. On that day, the revolutionists made a notable capture: they took the great fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, on Vassilievski Island in the Neva, across the chilly water from the Winter Palace. In the slender-spired church within the fortress are buried the dead rulers of the House of Romanoff; the mint is there also, and the grim dungeons of the political prisoners. Capturing the fortress, the crowd liberated these earlier revolutionists; and the stronghold of the old autocracy became the headquarters of the new revolution. The Admiralty, somewhat further down across the Neva, became the camp of the reactionaries. All the great public buildings about the Palace Square—the War Ministry, the Post and Telegraph Offices, the Foreign Ministry, the great Winter Palace itself—fell, one by one, into the hands of the revolutionaries. The guns of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul were presently trained upon the Admiralty, bureaucracy's final stronghold.

The soldiers of the Petrograd garrison had at first obeyed orders to disperse the rioters; the second step was, to fire not at, but above the heads of, the demonstrators; the third, to go over wholesale to the side of the revolution. The crowds magnanimously recognized that the first soldiers were doing their duty; even when many of their numbers fell, they were not resentful; and, when the soldiers swung round to their side, they joyfully welcomed them. From that moment, their success seemed sure.

In the palace which the great Catherine had given to Prince Potyemkin of the Tauris—conqueror of the Crimea—

the Duma had continued its sessions, disregarding the decree of prorogation. The last of the reactionaries at the Admiralty ordered the famous Preobrajenski regiment to march to the Tauris Palace, to drive the Duma out by force. At the Tauris Palace, the regiment was admitted and their leaders entered the session hall, where Rodzianko was presiding.

It is one of the great pictures of the revolution: The President of the Duma rose to the dramatic height of the situation. Standing and saluting—for he is a veteran officer of the Guard—he gave them the greeting with which the general salutes his troops: “Good health, soldiers!” The men of the famed Preobrajenski regiment saluted him and, in his person, the national Duma: “We wish you health, Your Excellency!” Within a few hours, 30,000 soldiers were under the Duma’s orders. The navy joined the army, and the marines from Cronstadt took the larger part in overcoming the military police. For these stood out to the last in defense of the obdurate ministers. Well supplied with machine-guns, they directed them against the revolutionists, from upper rooms, from roofs, from countless ambushes throughout the huge city, and for several days Petrograd witnessed scenes like the struggles for contested villages on the battle line in France.

But the part played by the Duma deserves fuller detail. On Sunday, March 11, the edict proroguing the assembly, countersigned by Prince Galitzin, President of the Council of Ministers, was read to the assembled Duma. The Duma determined not to disperse, but to hold a continuous session. Rodzianko immediately telegraphed to the Emperor, telling of the first steps of the revolution, and warning Nicholas of the danger to the throne. This telegram received no reply. Rodzianko telegraphed again to the Emperor, to the army commanders at the front, to the Chief of Staff, begging them to do what in them lay to enlighten their sovereign as to the realities of the situation. Immediate replies were received from General Alexeieff, General Ruzski, and General Brusiloff.

Thus supported by the army, the Duma considered the possibility of forming a provisional government. But before this task was more than begun, Rodzianko was summoned to the Anitchkoff Palace, the home of the Emperor’s mother, where he found Grand Duke Michael and the members of

the old ministry assembled. Rodzianko told the Emperor's brother the resolve of the Duma: the Emperor must abdicate in favor of his son Alexei, with Grand Duke Michael as regent. The existing ministry must give place to a ministry drawn from the Duma. Only in this way could the country be saved from anarchy; only in this way could the war be pressed to final victory.

Rodzianko, returning to the Tauris Palace, reported to the Duma, which thereupon unanimously voted the creation of a provisional government of thirteen members, in which all sections of the Duma from the Right to the Extreme Left were represented, under the presidency of Rodzianko. Colonel Engelhard, a member of the Duma, an officer of the Guard and of the General Staff, was chosen military governor of Petrograd. Another Duma member, Captain Karauloff, was made commandant of the Tauris Palace. The arrest of the members of the former ministry was next decreed. They had scattered throughout the city, but they were gradually brought in: Bark, Kokovtsoff, Prince Shakhovskoi, Goremykin, Shtsheglovitoff, Protopopoff; two former War Ministers, General Byelayeff and General Sukhomlinoff; and General Rennenkampf, accused of doubtful dealings in the East Prussia campaign. Sukhomlinoff was also under charges; the soldiers demanded that he should be given up to them for punishment, but the Duma refused. Sukhomlinoff himself tore the gold epaulettes from his shoulders and threw them at the feet of his accuser. General Knorring was killed and his body thrown into the Neva. It is said that Stuermer died of fear, at the moment of his arrest.

The Emperor now enters the drama. On Thursday, March 15—the fatal Ides of March—Alexander Gutchkoff, the new War Minister, and V. V. Shulgin, a member of the Duma Committee, met the Emperor on a train coming northward. With him were General Freedericksz, Minister of the Imperial House, and General Ruzski, commanding the armies of the Riga-Dwinsk front. The Emperor (says the official account) came forth to meet the representatives of the people quietly and calmly: "I have thought this all over," he said, "and have decided to abdicate. But I will not abdicate in favor of my son, as I shall have to leave Russia as soon as I divest myself of the supreme power. But to leave behind in Russia the son whom I so dearly love, in a position

of complete uncertainty, I hold to be altogether impossible. For this reason, I have decided to abdicate the throne in favor of my brother, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch."

Gutchkoff and Shulgin begged the Emperor to reconsider this decision, and Nicholas II withdrew to the inner compartment of the parlor-car in which this meeting was held. Twenty minutes later, he came out again with the text of a manifesto in his hand. The text, with which the world is now familiar, was written on a typewriter and corrected in pencil.

"My decision is firm and unchangeable," he said, handing the manifesto to Gutchkoff and Shulgin.

The plan of the Duma, that the Emperor's son Alexei, a boy of thirteen, should succeed to the throne, with his uncle, the Emperor's brother Michael, as regent, had broken down, because the Emperor would not consent to be separated from his son. On the following day, March 16, Minister Gutchkoff and Shulgin returned to Petrograd, where, at the railroad station, they found waiting for them members of the new Council of Ministers, with whom they proceeded to the home of the Grand Duke Michael. The ministers acquainted the Grand Duke with the wishes of Nicholas II, and also with the position of affairs, underlining the change of views which had taken place in certain circles in the last twenty-four hours.

Grand Duke Michael, after attentively listening to all the facts put before him, refused to accept the crown.

"How can I accept supreme power at such a time and under such conditions," he said, "when such a step on my part will only bring greater confusion?"

After an interchange of views, the Grand Duke Michael, asking Prince Lvoff and Shulgin to accompany him, withdrew to another room for consultation. Returning, the Grand Duke said:

"I am firmly determined not to accept the crown. But, if the Imperial Duma and the people desire that I should accept the regency pending the summoning and assembly of a Constituent Assembly, I am ready to consent to this."

The Minister of Justice, Alexander Kerenski, leader of the Labor Party, who had been present during the discussion, stepped forward to the Grand Duke and said:

"You are a man of honor. I shall inform all everywhere of your words and actions."

This closed the first act of the drama of revolution. The Duma had meanwhile transferred its sessions to the Winter Palace, giving up its former home, the Tauris Palace, to a newly constituted revolutionary body, the Committee of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, chosen on a basis of one delegate for each 1,000 workmen and one soldier for each company. It was presided over by Nicholas Tsheidze, a Georgian from the Caucasus mountains, who represented Tiflis in the Duma, and belonged to the Social Democrat Party. On the night of March 17-18, a manifesto, entitled "Order No. 1," supposed to emanate from this committee, or at any rate from a group of its members, was distributed among the soldiers and workmen. Certain French critics suggest that this order was really the work of German or pro-German agents. The order was violent in tone, attacking the Duma and the civil power and also the commanders of the army. The Provisional Government, seeing its danger, acted through Kerenski, the Minister of Justice, who is a Republican. Kerenski is said to have pointed out to Tsheidze that the order was inopportune, regrettable and dangerous; and it was followed by a second order, which received, we are told, the assent of Tsheidze. The purpose of "Order No. 2" was to neutralize the effect of "Order No. 1." Its text follows:

Order No. 2; March 5 (18), 1917: Executive Committee of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates.

To the Armies of the Petrograd district, to all soldiers of the Guard, army, artillery, and fleet, for exact fulfillment; to the workmen of Petrograd, for their information:

To explain and complete Order No. 1, the Executive Committee of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates orders:

(1) Order No. 1 of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates proposed to all companies, battalions, and other military units to elect committees for each unit (companies, battalions, and so forth), but the Order did not direct these committees to elect officers for each unit. These committees are to be elected in order that the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison may be organized and may, through the representatives of the committees, take part in the general political life of the country and, privately, announce to the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates their views as to the necessity of taking needed measures. The committee must further announce the common needs of each company or other military unit.



The question as to how far the interests of military organization may be harmonized with the right of the soldiers to choose their leaders is entrusted for consideration and elaboration to a special commission.

All elections which have up to the present taken place, confirmed or presented for confirmation to the military authorities, remain in force.

(2) Until the question of the election of officers has been completely and exactly decided the Council recognizes in the committees of the different military units the right to protest against the appointment of a given officer.

These protests must be sent to the Executive Committee of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, by which they will be presented to the Military Commission, in which representatives of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates take part, side by side with other organizations of society.

(3) In Order No. 1 was declared the purpose of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates as a body directing all the political acts of the soldiers of Petrograd. This, their elected organ, soldiers are under obligation to obey in their social and political life. As regards the military authorities, soldiers are under obligation to obey their orders which refer to military service.

(4) In Order No. 1, to guard against the danger of an armed counter-revolution, the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates demanded that the garrison of Petrograd, which won political liberty for Russia, should remain under arms, and the Provisional Government has undertaken not to permit the disarming of the garrison, as has been announced in its Administrative Declaration.

In conformity with this Declaration company and battalion committees are to see that the weapons of the soldiers of Petrograd are not taken from them, as was already ordered in Order No. 1.

(5) Regarding the demands contained in Sections 6 and 7 of Order No. 1, the Executive Committee of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates notes that several of them are already being carried out by the Provisional Government.

The present Order is to be read in all companies, battalions, regiments, ships' crews, batteries, and so forth, whether at the front or not.

Meanwhile, the Provisional Government, sitting in the Winter Palace, had summoned Lieutenant-General Korniloff to take command of the Petrograd garrison.

We are compelled to pass over altogether many vital phases of these stirring events in Petrograd and throughout Russia. But we have, I think, data enough already to understand pretty clearly what has since taken place.

The situation, and it is highly dangerous, appears to be

this: The Provisional Government, in a warning manifesto, said: "Petrograd and its vicinity are flooded with German spies. We must fight against them. But it is difficult to uncover the traitors. . . ." The traitors appear to have uncovered themselves. They are the inflammatory advocates of "the social revolution" in the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, a body entirely without lawful authority, gathered together at haphazard from the workshops of the capital and from the youthful soldiers—in reality no more than boys—in the regiments about Petrograd. Deluded by agitators like the Tiflis Socialist orator, they have with amazing success played Germany's game; and, unfortunately, the Provisional Government has not felt itself strong enough to suppress instantly, and drastically, in the name of genuine liberty, their proceedings, but has, on the contrary, made concessions and compromises which are highly dangerous. Among these, the most fatal are the measures loosening the bands of discipline in the army, in effect telling the soldiers they are under no binding obligation to obey their officers. Anything more calamitous, in the face of an armed and treacherous foe, it would be impossible to imagine.

Emboldened by this first great success, the agents of Germany have taken the next step: they have openly denounced other members of the Entente; they have tried to discredit and overthrow the Provisional Government, to make way for a junta of pro-German Socialists; they have openly cried out for peace with Germany. The Provisional Government, challenging a vote in the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, has won a victory by so narrow a margin—only 35, we are told, out of 2,500—that it is hardly distinguishable from defeat. For the moment, a kind of security has been gained, but we may be quite certain that neither determination nor gold will be lacking to the German agents, further to press their plot.

Meanwhile, throughout Russia, there is a rising tide of wrath against these treacherous doings in Petrograd, which, by the way, are receiving vigorous "aid and comfort" from American Socialists with German names. Strong protests, behind which stands an entire readiness for vigorous action, are coming to Petrograd from the leaders of the army. As this is written, we appear to be, once again, on the eve of decisive events.

CHARLES JOHNSTON.